

Old Turtle

Text by Douglas Wood
Watercolors by Cheng-Khee Chee







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*This story is dedicated to my sons, Bryan and Eric,
and to children of all ages who love turtles
and rocks and rivers and other living things.*

—Douglas Wood

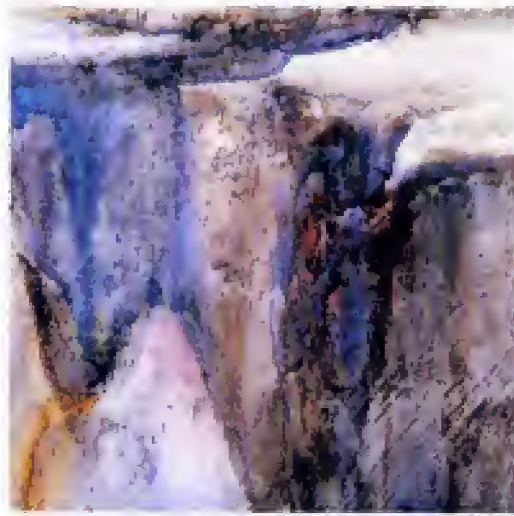
*These paintings are dedicated to my children,
and to Bee who has always encouraged me
and made time for me to paint.*

—Cheng-Khee Chee

Once, long long ago . . .
yet somehow, not so very long . . .



when all the animals



and rocks



and winds and waters



and trees



and birds



and fish





and all the beings of the world
could speak . . .
and understand one another . . .

There began . . . AN ARGUMENT.

It began softly at first . . .

Quiet as the first breeze that whispered,
“He is a wind who is never still.”

Quiet as the stone that answered,
“He is a great rock that never moves.”

Gentle as the mountain that rumbled,
“God is a snowy peak, high above the clouds.”





And the fish in the ocean that answered, "God is a swimmer, in the dark blue depths of the sea."





"No," said the star,
"God is a twinkling
and a shining,
far, far away."

"No," replied the ant,
"God is a sound
and a smell and a feeling,
who is very, very close."

"God," insisted the antelope,
"is a runner, swift and free,
who loves to leap
and race with the wind."





"She is a great tree,"
murmured the willow,
"a part of the world,
always growing
and always giving."

"You are wrong,"
argued the island,
"God is separate and apart."

"God is like the shining sun,
far above all things,"
added the blue sky.

"No, He is a river,
who flows through the very
heart of things,"
thundered the waterfall.

“She is a hunter,” roared the lion.
“God is gentle,” chirped the robin.
“He is powerful,” growled the bear.

And the argument

grew LOUDER

and LOUDER

and LOUDER . . .

until . . .

STOP!

A new voice spoke.

It rumbled loudly, like thunder.

And it whispered softly, like butterfly sneezes.

The voice seemed to come from . . .

why it seemed to come from . . .

. . . Old Turtle!

Old Turtle hardly ever said anything,

and certainly never argued about God.

But now Old Turtle began to speak.







"God is indeed deep,"
she said to the fish in the sea;
"and much higher than high,"
she told the mountains.

"He is swift and free as the wind,
and still and solid as a great rock,"
she said to the breezes and stones.

"She is the life of the world,"
Turtle said to the willow.
"Always close by, yet beyond
the farthest twinkling light,"
she told the ant and the star.

"God is gentle and powerful.
Above all things
and within all things.

"God is all that we dream of,
and all that we seek,"
said Old Turtle,
"all that we come from
and all that we can find.

"God IS."



Old Turtle had never said so much before.
All the beings of the world were surprised,
and became very quiet.

But Old Turtle had one more thing to say.

“There will soon be
a new family of beings in the world,” she said,
“and they will be strange and wonderful.

“They will be reminders of all that God is.



“They will come in many colors and shapes,
with different faces
and different ways of speaking.

“Their thoughts will soar to the stars,
but their feet will walk the earth.



“They will possess many powers.
They will be strong, yet tender,
a message of love from God to the earth,
and a prayer from the earth back to God.”

And the people came.





But the people forgot.
They forgot that they were
a message of love,
and a prayer from the earth.

And they began to argue . . .
about who knew God,
and who did not;
and where God was,
and was not;
and whether God was,
or was not.

And often the people
misused their powers,
and hurt one another.
Or killed one another.

And they hurt the earth.

Until finally even the forests
began to die . . .





. . . and the rivers
and the oceans
and the plants and the animals
and the earth itself . . .

Because the people could not
remember who they were,
or where God was.

Until one day there came a voice,
like the growling of thunder;
but as soft as butterfly sneezes,

Please, STOP.



And after a long,
lonesome and scary time . . .



. . . the people listened,
and began to hear . . .

And to see God in one another . . .





... and in the beauty of all the Earth.

And Old Turtle smiled.



And so did God.



